

House Passes Bill Eliminating Support for Maine Airports

Friday, April 01 2011

Presque Isle, Bar Harbor, Rockland, and Augusta impacted

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud voted against a four-year reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which passed the full House of Representatives by a vote of 223-196 this afternoon. The bill eliminates Essential Air Service (EAS) program support for airports across the country, including ones in Presque Isle, Bar Harbor, Rockland, and Augusta. The most recent long-term FAA reauthorization bill expired September 30, 2007. Since then, Congress has passed a series of short-term extensions of FAA's authority.

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"This bill will force some airports in Maine to close their doors. This is absolutely the wrong time to be eliminating this crucial economic support," said Michaud. "Airports not only serve as significant economic centers of communities, but they often serve entire regions. We need to be doing everything we can to attract businesses, and this would be a significant step back for economic development and job creation in our state. I strongly urge the House and Senate to negotiate a final bill that preserves the EAS program."

On February 17th, the Senate passed its version of the FAA measure without eliminating the EAS program. Michaud joined with Congressman Adrian Smith (R-NE) today to write a bipartisan letter to lead House negotiators urging them to work to preserve the EAS program during the upcoming conference negotiations with the Senate over a final FAA bill.

The EAS program provides subsidies to air carriers for providing service between selected small communities and hub airports. The program was originally established in 1978 as part of airline deregulation to ensure a minimum level of air service to smaller communities that might otherwise lose service because of economic factors. In February, Michaud sent a letter to his colleagues on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee urging them to support the EAS program. Before sending his letter, Michaud solicited advice from Maine airports that currently participate in the program.

Scott E Wardwell, the Airport Director for the City of Presque Isle, said: "With over 150 airports throughout the United States receiving a subsidy from the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, simply eliminating the program would have a devastating effect on businesses located in rural communities. In the global economy, businesses need to have access to convenient and dependable air service to compete on the world stage. In Maine, four of the six airports with passenger air service receive a subsidy. One of the four is a full three hours away from the next nearest airport."

M. Allison Navia, the Airport Manager for the Hancock County – Bar Harbor Airport, said: "I would like to express my support for the Essential Air Service (EAS) Program, specifically at the Hancock County – Bar Harbor Airport (BHB) in Trenton, Maine.

"The elimination of EAS would have a devastating effect on BHB, the local economy, and the surrounding community. Our massive summer tourism industry, that even President Obama took part in, would suffer the loss of air carrier service, effectively removing air travel as a mode of transportation to our area for the general public. During the winter months, many local businesses, including the Jackson Laboratory, that use our air service for their travel needs

would be left without this option. Job losses would also result, hurting many people and their families in a time when the people of our country cannot afford to be jobless.

“I would be in support of reworking the EAS Program to make it more efficient and effective. I am not, however, in support of pulling the rug out from under my airport and my community, leaving us all scrambling to pick up the pieces and struggling for a solution.”

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